

Aims to Raise Awareness About Veteran and Service Member Mental Health Issues

Washington, DC – Thursday, Representatives Teague (NM-02), Roe (TN-01), McMahon (NY-13), and Rooney (FL-16) announced the founding of the Congressional Invisible Wounds Caucus. The mission of the caucus is to promote awareness of and solutions for the mental health challenges facing our service members and veterans.

In a letter encouraging other members to join the caucus the Representatives wrote:

“There can be no question that PTSD and other serious unseen wounds of war, and our collective inability to identify and treat mental illness in our troops and veterans, has become a pressing national issue worthy of our attention.

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As a nation, we are not doing enough to identify mental illness in and provide adequate mental health care for our returning service members.□ The price of our neglect is paid by our returned service members and those close to them in the form of depression, lower quality of life, economic insecurity, substance abuse, and suicide.□ The history of neglecting the mental health concerns of service members is as long as our history of military conflict, but changes in combat and conflict now mean that greater and greater percentages of our men and women in uniform are afflicted with wounds that are unseen.□ The time has come to confront mental health issues in our returning service members and veterans head on.”

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The caucus will explore responses to rising incidents of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), traumatic brain injury (TBI), depression, substance abuse, and suicide among veterans and active duty military. *Congressional Quarterly* recently reported that more American military personnel took their own lives in 2009 than were killed in either the Afghanistan or Iraq wars. In 2009, 259 men and women lost their lives serving their country in Afghanistan, and 76 were killed serving their country in Iraq, but no fewer than 349 service members committed suicide.

According to a RAND Corporation study from last year, nearly 20 percent of military service members who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan report symptoms of PTSD or major depression. Additionally, 19 percent of returning service members report that they experienced a possible TBI while deployed.

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